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The Question of Methods.*

By **Professor Paul H. Grumann**, Uni. of Nebraska.

A general survey of German courses in America will reveal so much diversity of character and aims, that one is inclined to agree with the writer who called this the Storm and Stress Period of German instruction. There is a loud insistence upon the practical, which is correct enough, if the term is not interpreted too superficially.

Probably the most appalling thing about the present situation is the character of the reading that is being done. A generation ago German courses contained rather solid and substantial matter. Today many schools never get beyond distinctly trivial reading, and the vast majority make strong concessions to triviality.

This situation is due partly to the demand for "Realien", a demand which springs from sound pedagogical principles. No one will deny that the teacher of German should be versed in German life and that he should have ample illustrative material to interpret this life to his pupils. In America it almost seems, however, that the teacher of German need no longer to be equipped in German literature and history. Many high-school students read text after text consisting of nothing but "Realien" and never get within hailing distance of the rich cultural heritage of their subject. This is like serving nothing but dessert for a meal. The dessert which might be a source of pleasure and nourishment becomes so nauseating that one rebels against it. The incorrect use of "Realien" has also exposed the teacher of German to the charge of jingoism, a charge which under present conditions may prove to be rather disastrous.

But the triviality of our reading matter may be traced more definitely to the confusion of methods and aims in our elementary courses. Pupils no longer have that grasp of grammar and that large basic vocabulary that might enable them to read the more substantial texts. The inevitable result has been that teachers have been forced to lower the standards of the reading courses to meet the emergency.

When the old method was abandoned, teachers began to experiment with various types of the direct method. Basing their departure on the very helpful thought of Froebel and Pestalozzi, they concluded that they must follow the practice of the small child at play. They forgot that in all countries the language teaching of the mother and the natural

* The author uses the word "Direct Method" in a meaning different from what it stands at the present time. His conception of the "Direct Method" appears to be identical with that of the "Natural Method". This, of course, tempts to draw conclusions which are unfounded in the principles of the "Direct Method". The Editor.

environment must be supplemented by the school, before the child learns to use language consciously and intelligently. They attempted to crowd a mass of 'mother's language training' into an hour daily at school, forgetting that this miracle cannot be kept up five days in the week and six hours per day. It presupposes that the adolescent mind was identical with that of the small child and thus involved a waste of energy that might have been utilized more wisely.

In the hands of well trained teachers, teachers who had an easy mastery of German, much good was accomplished in spots. The overwhelming majority of pupils trained by this method were not well prepared in grammar, they read unintelligently, they pronounced by imitation; in short they lacked independence. Even their colloquial exercises remained rather amateurish. The pupils who received their training from direct method teachers whose German was faulty, were victims of an abuse that can hardly be overstated.

It would be a mistake however to state that the direct method propaganda has been without good results. It has called attention to the importance of oral work, it has laid a certain emphasis on the language of common experience and has stimulated the use of object lessons. Last, but by no means least, it has put life into the German classes. This has been attended by glaring evils. It has dignified the 'live wire who does things' far beyond his importance. The "Himmelstürmer" is interesting to children, but he does not always bring solid progress and culture. Vim and energy often lead to confusion in the class room, but that does not mean that interesting and vigorous teaching are not very desirable.

When the direct method met with more or less disaster the inductive method promised to supply the needed relief. Teachers of Latin were less critical than teachers of German in adopting it. The extreme application of this method lasted only a short time, for its most extreme advocates soon made compromises in their text-books.

The crucial error that the inductive teachers made, was that they did not follow their method to its psychological basis. They assumed that inductive teaching simply meant the abstracting of grammatical principles from connected reading matter. If this were all that is involved, inductive language teaching would be doomed, for the pupil would simply get the impression that the living sentence is a fit object for dissection. This would be as bad pedagogically as the practice of that infamous teacher of biology, who required his pupils to bring living insects to the class, where they were torn limb from limb.

The basis of inductive language teaching lies deeper. The inductive language teacher utilizes the language experience that the child has had, and by skilful presentation, calls the half-conscious and the sub-conscious

into full living consciousness. It becomes quite clear then, that the inductive method cannot be used in the first stages of foreign language work, for the pupil has had no experiences in the foreign language that can be recalled to consciousness. After the initial stages have been passed, after the pupil has used the language to some extent, the method may be used very effectively.

But the foreign language teacher may even use the inductive method in the initial stages. The pupil has had years of experience in the mother tongue. If the testimony of almost all teachers is to be trusted, the pupil does not have a clear grammatical consciousness of the mother tongue. It therefore becomes the duty of the teacher to present the mother tongue inductively, as an introduction to the instruction in the foreign language on the deductive plan. This becomes doubly plausible when the mother tongue and the foreign language are as closely related as German and English.

Frequently old institutions are discarded for new ones, when an honest effort to correct and improve them would be preferable to experimentation with untried possibilities, to "flying to others that we know not of." It is a question, whether the old books were failures because they stressed grammar. It is not impossible that they failed because they did not teach grammar adequately. After all, grammar is classified and rationalized linguistic experience, and it may not be a mistake to teach it to adolescents who have arrived at the age of discrimination. The danger lies in teaching grammar that does not really reflect the language. Instead of casting out **grammar**, it might be wise to utilize it more pedagogically.

The defects of the old books, and some more recent ones, become clear when one subjects them to critical examination. It almost seems as if no attempt had been made to grade the difficulties for the pupil. Whole paragraphs are thrown at him at once. Irregular forms precede regular ones to which they are the exceptions, modal auxiliaries precede regular verbs, and so on indefinitely. Under such conditions the child cannot get an orderly unfolding of the subject. Grammar for him becomes a mass of disconnected facts, jumbled in a haphazard manner.

While the language masters were devising new methods of instruction, the philologists were steadily proving that all language phenomena have causes. To borrow Professor Karsten's quotation of Browning: "All's love and all's law." This work was carried on in the graduate courses. Some of it leaked into the lower courses, but little into the text-books. A few sporadic attempts, such as the introduction of Verner's Law into primers, met with deserved disaster.

But upon closer examination, it will be found that more solid help can be gleaned from the philologists than from the language masters,

whose methods dazzle more than they enlighten. Good science is at bottom good pedagogy, even if it is granted that the science must be adjusted to the grade of intelligence to be served by it. The elementary German teacher can find much help here. He can rationalize much that has remained vague and quixotic. There is not a single gender that does not have some cause, and it might be valuable to clear as many of these cases up as possible instead of having them learned by rote. Most irregularities can be explained on rational grounds, and the explanation can be made easy enough to make its appeal to the child. Simple facts of historical grammar are not beyond the mind of the adolescent. Such training in grammar gives the pupil the consciousness that he is doing rational work and it corrects his whole attitude toward his mother tongue. The slogan should be, not less grammar but better grammar, grammar that reflects the best thought on the subject.

One of the most serious defects of the direct method, as generally handled, has been its failure to teach pronunciation adequately. The parrot-like imitation has been continued that teachers of the mother tongue have given up quite generally. Here again the phoneticians have been of greater assistance than the language masters. The phonetician has given the teacher new and reliable means of detecting mistakes and means of correcting mistakes where mere imitation fails. He has enabled teachers to make pupils independent in their pronunciation, to bring intelligent consciousness into their work.

Most important of all, the phonetician has given us the criteria by means of which the work in pronunciation may be graded, so the pupil may advance from the easy to the difficult by gradual steps. It is clear that the *ch* in *ich* is easier than the *ch* in *ach*, *och*, *Mädchen*, or *Röckchen*. But the natural deductions have not been made in our elementary instruction. A recent elementary book, picked up quite at random, contains the following words in the first vocabulary: *Artikel*, *Nominativ*, *Lektion*, *Geschlecht*, *Subject*, *bezeichnen*, *grammatisch*, *sächlich*, *möglich*, etc. A careful application of phonetic principles to the problem would obviate such mistakes.

All foreign language instruction should improve the pupil's general linguistic facility, it should lead to linguistic enlightenment. The teacher should get some help from the direct method and the inductive method will be a boon to him. He will do well to keep in touch with the general literature of pedagogy and psychology. More important than all this however is that he keep in touch with linguistic research, for as he himself makes new discoveries in this field he will generate the enthusiasm that will enable him to get some of the results of research to his most elementary pupils.